

# Cover Story by "Red Hill"

## A Family Monopoly

This is a story of one family's involvement with the Post Office Department at a rural location. This family had at least one member as an employee of the local office for 63 years and all employees assigned to it for 19 years. This Post Office is located in eastern Pennsylvania about half way between Philadelphia and Easton on the main route that connects the two cities – route 611. The original village was founded around 1738 by a group of Scotch-Irish Presbyterians. The earliest record of a post office in the village is 1814. Other villages in the area were also founded in the early to mid 1700's by immigrants from Germany and surrounding European counties. By the mid 1800's the German descendents (today called Pennsylvania Germans) had pretty much dominated the area with many Lutheran and Mennonite churches in the area.

Back to the story. The first member of the family to be hired by the Post Office Department was the father. In the fall of 1921 he took over a rural free delivery route of about seven miles and 50 families. During the next 50 years the route expanded to 71 miles and over 700 families serviced by the same mail carrier. The father had to retire six months short of working 50 years for the Department due to the department's mandatory retirement age of 70. As a child I have fond memories of riding with him (my grandfather) during summer vacations and occasionally other times. Since he was fluent in both English and German he individually helped many of his customers. He would delivery letters from "the old county – Germany" to elderly residents written in German. The next day he would find either the resident waiting for him or a note in the mailbox to blow his horn. He would translate the letter for them. Often, the next day there would be a letter in English asking him to translate it to German and mail it (an envelope with the correct postage attached or money inside would be attached). He also carried a stock of stamps with him. Residents would leave an envelope with money in it asking him to leave stamps or an envelope with the correct postage amount taped to it. He would take the stamps from his stock and fulfill the request. I found out later that he would pay out of his own pocket for the stamps since rural carriers officially were not allowed to carry stamps not already paid for at the home office.

As far as can be determined, the actual post office was housed in one of the general stores until the late 1930's. At that time the local Ford dealership built a new building and the owner renovated the old building. One part of the building became the local fire department. The old dealership's office next to garage (an area about twenty feet square) was converted into the "new" post office. There will be more about this in a future article.

In 1948 the office grew to the point that it needed a part-time clerk. The father encouraged his daughter to apply and was hired. In 1953 the postmaster retired and the daughter became postmistress. The father's daughter-in-law was hired as the part-time clerk at this time. Thus, from 1953 to the spring of 1972 all of the employees assigned to the office were related. The daughter remained postmistress until 1978 when she retired. The daughter-in-law did not want to be promoted at that time, so she remained the part-time clerk. She remained the part-time clerk until she retired in 1983.

The names of the people involved have purposely not been included. The author plans to have several additional articles and a small contest will follow for members to try and determine which member of the club is related to this family.

**Please see the front cover of this newsletter for two postal history items related to this evolving story.**

**[Editors Note: The CFSC will be providing a first and second place prize for the top two finishers in this contest.]**

# Reminiscences

By Michael Rogers



Grandpa and Grandma Berner lived the American dream. Emigrating to New York in 1920, they found work as a stock clerk and seamstress. Grandpa's diligence impressed his boss enough to introduce him to others in the trade. Pooling their savings, my grandparents soon had a dry goods store of their own, backed by good credit. Berner's, never a large affair, made its way through the Depression and fed a family.

Continuing a family tradition, I worked one summer with my grandparents in the store. Cousins Martin, now an attorney, and Milton, a corporate accountant, had summered in the store, learning that retail was monotonous and hard work, exactly as planned. The immigrant generation had to work, bypassing an education. Now they wanted their children and grandchildren to be educated and successful.

So here I was, a 12 year old, helping out in the store. Ladies housedresses were a big seller as were men's pants. I remember "dressing the window," pins in my mouth, Grandpa outside the plate glass motioning where I should position each article of clothing.

Grandpa queried me at summer's end. I thought it a great adventure! Expecting he'd hear the same as my cousins, he said I learned the wrong lesson. Get an education first, then you'll have a choice.

Well, I have the education. To the consternation of my parents, I elected to become a stamp dealer after college.

I opened Winter Park Stamp Shop on tony Park Avenue in June of 1978. Park Avenue is the premier shopping destination of all of Central Florida. Instant name recognition. The Avenue gave a stamp shop credibility. An audacious move because my total net worth was \$6,000 including inventory.

I had some things going for me. As I was desperately short of funds, I had to be very careful setting up the shop. As it was Park Avenue, it had to be first rate. The interior designer was into stamps so we traded; her father build the cabinetry (yup, he collected), the electrician collected, and on down the line. Little came out of my pocket. What I didn't have in stock we put on memo.

Betting on the Avenue was that I'd last six months. (I closed the store in December, 2007, after 29 years!) John McDaniel had his own place down the street but he was on the second floor without the visibility that a street level shop provides. Still, he'd been in town for years with a formidable inventory.

Winter Park Stamp Shop never could have succeeded without others working in the shop. I knew what I knew and was the first to acknowledge what I didn't know. I remember what a dealer told me in my youth about being a stamp dealer. Remember that not one person knows it all so hire the best people you can. I've followed those words best I could.

I lucked into Bob Womack who was so adept on United States that we used to joke he could put his finger on a stamp and tell you the watermark. Enormously talented in U.S. and worldwide, both stamps and postal history, Bob wanted nothing more than to stay in the background, playing with stamps.

My friend Alvin Hintz hurt his back working in the warehouse company he'd been in for over a decade. I hired him for the shop as he had a soft-spoken demeanor and got along with everyone. A lifelong British Commonwealth collector, Alvin stayed for 19 years.

Having a shop means of life of anecdotes. You never know what's going to happen.

Inevitably there'd be the good natured competition between us. John had brought me into town as his employee; now I was his equal, albeit his junior. He'd made it easier for me as I'd worked for him in 1973-76 over the counter, making friends with local collectors. I know John found it perplexing that any business came my way. Location, location, location.

A guy in advertising named Charlie Patterson came up with the idea of a monthly newsletter; I called it the *Central Florida Stamp News*. Expanding to eight legal-sized pages, it carried a "Point of View" column with price lists, employee bios and stamp shows.

One day a man came in huffing and puffing, gray in his face, so I gave him a cup of

water. He said that if I wanted to buy his stamp collections, I needed to accompany him to his truck to view. What he had were over 1,000 pounds of Postal Commemorative Society 22 carat gold plated first day covers and such. Big heavy sets that cost someone a bundle but aren't worth diddly in the secondary market. He'd been to McDaniel's but John made him carry everything (!) upstairs just to be told he didn't buy that kind of stuff.

Would I buy it? You betcha! I was on the Avenue, so I just knew they would sell, just not near the original price. So we struck a deal and I bought the batch. Hardest part was lugging them in.

As my shop had but 516 square feet, the trick was to use what little space we had to the best advantage. The back of the shop was reserved for the library which grew over the years to over a thousand volumes. In the day when most dealers were content with the Scott and Harris catalogues, I could maximize my dollars because I had the ability to research what came in the door. My rule was never sell anything unless I understood it.

A gentleman offered the U.S. 1922 high values affixed to parcel tags. These aren't addressed in the Scott Specialized Catalogue, but you'll find them in auction catalogues. Then it was a matter of placing my purchases with an appreciative buyer.

Some dealers will tell you the best thing about owning a stamp shop is the buying opportunities. I had a different take.

I loved having a stamp shop because I made so many friendships. Sure, I'd have obnoxious or rude people occasionally, but I'd play a game with myself to see if I could turn them around. Folks would come in the shop and I'd be helpful filling their needs so it was only natural sitting across the counter chatting away. We'd intersperse stamps with family and more. My sense was that I'd spend eight hours working so what better way than with friends?

Every day's a blessing! ☒